

Crystal Lake

Sunday afternoon. Thirty four degrees. Intermittent snow showers. A thoroughly gray day had hunkered down on the bare cornfields of southern Minnesota. The only color visible around me it seemed was my new purple and lavender jacket, a souvenir of a shopping trip while attending the just concluded Fall Harvest in Minneapolis. Despite the subdued light, it seemed to shimmer against the black interior of the SHO.

I was on my way back home to Nebraska, easing southward through the gloom, feeling relaxed and sexy at the same time with my elegantly long acrylic nails. After four days I had finally gotten used to them reaching their destination a full five minutes before my fingers did.

I was wearing my favorite black tank top unitard and red hair. The new purple jacket had made this a "killer" outfit in my opinion. Not exactly what the local girls were apt to be wearing but I had long ago given up on the idea of "passing". As long as I feel that it's tasteful, it's a "good look."

I kicked off my flats and curled one leg up under me and basked in the ample heat put out by the SHO's heater. The Vikes were on the radio and playing well. Not that I'm a big Vikings fan or a big fan of football for that matter, it just seemed appropriate for the conditions.

That morning we had a farewell brunch at the Sheraton. We stood in line with the Vikings fans in town to see the game. They were in purple. We were in dresses. Well, except for me anyway. I just had to wear that unitard. Surely I looked like just another fan on her way to the game with her purple jacket and gold jewelry.

Small towns came and passed as I made for the Iowa line. The weather changed little, but I stayed warm and reveled in the "cozy" feeling that had enveloped me, safe and secure, wrapped in the rush of summery air from the dash. The cold gray outside could not reach me. I drummed my finger tips on the stick shift knob in time with nothing in particular. Soon these gorgeous nails would be gone and I wanted to drink in the delicious "click" they made while I could.

Inevitably I needed to make a pit stop and refuel. A sign ahead said, "Crystal Lake."

"Good as any," I thought and pulled into the first gas station.

I wanted to use the bathroom first and get that out of the way. The doors were on the outside of the tiny building so I went in for the key. A young twenty something man was on his knees inside, reloading the cooler with Cokes. He glanced up at me and his eyes narrowed in an all-too familiar manner. Making

no pretense as to who I was, I asked for the key to the bathroom in my very male voice. He obliged by handing me the key to the boy's room.

"Ah... what the heck. Makes no difference," I said and headed back out the door.

Soon I returned from the cold bathroom and handed him back the key.

"I'm going to fill up the car now," I stated, again in an all too male voice.

"OK"

I fueled up the SHO, standing against the gray in my bright purple jacket. I was delighted to find that it was as warm as it was pretty. I couldn't help but wonder though what the young man inside was thinking about his most recent customer.

Soon the tank was full and it was time to go inside and pay.

I dug out the money out of my clutch, feeling proud of how well I was maneuvering the long blackberry colored nails. He took the money and gave me my change.

Then he asked, "So... how do people react when they see you like this?"

I stood silent for just a moment, shocked that this youngster actually had the nerve to speak to me.

What do I tell you, young man with the bright blue eyes? Do I tell you of the anger, curiosity, or just plain amusement on other's faces? Do I tell you of hushed laughter? Of veiled smiles? Do I tell you how much it hurts to be looked upon as a "thing", a curiosity, rather than a person? To forever be held at arm's length? Should I tell you that I do this to fight back against those things?

An instant later, I blurted out, "Open mouthed amazement mostly." Without pausing I added, "I am on my home to Nebraska. I just spent the weekend in Minneapolis with one hundred others like me at a convention. We had a great time. We were treated well. It's a great city. It's something that you can be proud of."

He stood silent for a moment. Other customers were filtering in. Then he smiled and simply said, "Good."

"Good," I thought and turned to go. "Good."